



by Ltjg. Timothy Kinsella

My first deployment as an H2P had been successful. I was part of the SAR detachment on board the USS *Peleliu* (LHA 5), and by the end of the cruise had become quite comfortable with my flying abilities in the H-46D. I was looking forward to making HAC and—after 80 straight days at

sea—looking forward to seeing home even more. We stopped in Hawaii to pick up Tigers while en route to San Diego, planning several flight demonstrations and familiarization tours to keep them busy on the trip home. Throughout cruise, our detachment had worked successfully with the EOD personnel. We were going to do a final cast and recovery with them, which involved some demolition charges for the Tiger demonstration.

Prior to our aircrew brief, we briefed as usual with the EOD to establish our course of action in the event of an emergency. After launching from *Peleliu*, we were cleared to the starboard delta to await our commence time. The plan was to place a buoy in the ocean on the port side, 1,000 yards ahead of the ship, so the demo would go off as the ship passed. While waiting for all this to happen, the crew chief decided to give some impromptu training to the second crewman. Keeping our mission in mind, he ran through several hoist-failure scenarios. His forethought would prove invaluable.


Eventually the time came for us to set up the buoy and prepare the demo charges. *Peleliu*'s flight deck was crowded with Tigers looking forward to seeing the explosion. After some confusion with Center on where exactly to place the buoy, we flew a 10-knot, 10-foot approach and jumped two EOD personnel with the buoy and charges. The waves were 4 to 6 feet high, but the divers appeared to be doing well. Upon getting the "OK" signal, we perched about 100 yards to the left and climbed up to 150 feet to avoid the salt spray and give the divers some room to work. After about five minutes, we received the pick-up signal, maneuvered over the divers, and descended to 30 feet for the pick-up. The crew chief was operating the hoist. Just after the hook reached the water, he reported a hoist failure and leak. The HAC and I looked at our gauges and saw our utility system and No. 2 flight-boost system had gone to zero.

The pilot at the controls (the HAC) immediately began transitioning to forward

flight, not realizing there was a diver on the hook. The crew chief was having a hard time cutting the cable; the switch was covered in hydraulic oil, so it was hard to break the shear-wire on the switch cover. He told the pilot that we had a diver on the hook, the HAC stabilized the helicopter, and the crew chief told us the cable had been cut. We transitioned to forward flight, gained altitude, and bustered to the ship, which was about four miles away.

While all this was happening, I ran through the emergency procedures, declared an emergency, and informed Tower the SAR aircraft needed to pick up the EOD divers. The second crewman ensured the passengers were strapped in, then broke out the pocket checklist and completed the emergency procedures once again.

The ship cleared the deck in record time, and we brought the helo in for a landing on spot 7. We immediately shut down the aircraft, deciding not to use the rotor brake for fear of starting a fire with so much hydraulic fluid leaking. Not only had a supply line broken on the hoist, but a fitting had backed off the pressure line from the pump. Consequently, 3,000-psi hydraulic fluid was streaming out all over the back of the aircraft. The crew chief was drenched from head to toe with fluid from the winch.

Even though we had discussed this emergency and practiced it half an hour before, the suddenness of it shocked us all. Although the time between losing the hoist and landing was only about six minutes, it seemed more like six hours. I learned a valuable lesson: you can never be too prepared. A simple operation very quickly turned into a potentially fatal one, as is so often the case with aircraft emergencies. Excellent crew coordination, a prompt response to the emergency, and quick thinking helped us land safely. No matter how comfortable you are with the mission, always be prepared. 

Ltjg. Kinsella flies with HC-11